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OAS Grows Up-- Dared to Cut Beard

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AMID A WELTER of final abrazos and parting handshakes, the hemisphere's foreign ministers burst out of the colonnaded Hall of the Americas in the Pan American Building just a week ago. They left behind a smattering of overfilled ashtrays, the echo of bitter debate, and their names scrawled on a highly controversial document which Colombian Ambassador Alfredo Vazquez Carrizosa says "finally brings the Treaty of Rio into the 20th century."

Most of the delegates praised the final act of this conference in equally glowing terms. Secretary of State Dean Rusk called the meeting "the most important ever held in this hemisphere." Venezuela's Ignacio Iribarren, whose nation's protest against Castro's interference had touched off the conference, concluded, "We have significantly strengthened the Organization of American States, and with it hemispheric solidarity."

Almost drowned out in the euphoria was the warning of Mexico's representative, OAS Ambassador Vicente Sanchez Gavito, whose foreign minister deliberately snubbed the conference. Perspiration trickling down his face, Sanchez Gavito solemnly declared in the closing hours of debate that "it seems to me incontrovertible that if these measures are adopted, the inter-American solidarity will find itself in the most difficult test of its long history."

The contrast between the broad grins of the majority, and the doomsday predictions of the four OAS nations that finally chose to vote against the resolutions, reflects a gap between two fundamentally opposed concepts of hemispheric organization within the 21-nation OAS. It was this difference which the conference had to resolve. IN ITS SIMPLEST terms, the dispute is over striving for "quality" of action

or "quantity" of votes in hemispheric actions; in short, whether to take meaningful decisions by a majority vote over the profound objections—for domestic political or juridical reasons—of some members of the organization.

The facts to be discussed were simple enough. Last November a Venezuelan goat-herder spotted two men digging on a deserted stretch of Caribbean beach. Investigating Venezuela militiamen probed in the sand and came up with a three-ton cache of small arms, mortars and grenades.

A short time later Venezuela brought the matter before the OAS, charging that the arms were delivered by Castro for insurgents trying to prevent the upcoming democratic elections. Venezuela called for punitive measures against Castro under terms of the 1947 Rio Treaty, the basic defense backbone of the OAS charter.

An exhaustive OAS study—including use of the most sophisticated metallurgical research—proved the charges, and in February the OAS study team submitted its report: Castro was guilty as charged.

It now remained to decide on sanctions against Castro. According to the treaty, measures open to the ministers included "recall of chiefs of diplomatic missions; breaking of diplomatic relations; breaking of consular relations or rail, sea, air, postal . . . communications; and use of armed force." When decided by a two-thirds majority, these measures (with the exception of the use of armed force) are mandatory for member nations.

But while all the OAS members except Mexico accepted the premise that aggression had in fact been committed, and none of them showed any particular pro-Castro sentiment, the opposing concepts of how best to strengthen the OAS clashed over the question of which of these measures to take. THE FIVE-MONTH DELAY between the investigating committee's findings

in February and convening of the conference demonstrated the deep reluctance within the organization to force a showdown on these differences. The change of government in Venezuela, the Panama riots and the Haitian-Dominican crisis were admittedly partly to blame for the lag; but the basic reason was fear of a shattering collision of ideas which might damage the organization by leaving some members in a position of not complying with a majority decision.

When the ministers finally convened in Washington, Venezuela stated the "hard line" most succinctly. This view, which ultimately became the decision of the majority, holds that all the members signed the Rio Treaty; that the treaty provides for certain measures in case of aggression; that aggression in fact took place; and that all the ministers had to do was to take these measures.

Failure to punish Castro in such a clearly delineated case, they argued, would merely confirm the oft-held view that the OAS is little more than an expensive debating society. Although other nations raised the issue of Castro's Marxist-Leninist beliefs in debates, Venezuela stuck strictly to the intervention by Castro in its domestic affairs.

THE PROBLEMS in applying the treaty are the myriad of political and juridical considerations—some valid and many more pure hokum—which prompted the four nations (Mexico, Chile, Uruguay and Bolivia) to oppose mandatory sanctions against Cuba, and which raise the threat that one or more of these nations may refuse to comply with the decision of the conference.

Mexico fought all the way at the conference as the most outspoken minority action. Behind a barrage of arguments ranging from rejection of aggression charges to a

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denial that Venezuela was ever endangered by the Castro arms, the Mexicans thundered against a resolution that would be passed by 15 nations while actually affecting just the four nations still maintaining ties to Cuba. Such action, they argued, was "profoundly contrary to the concept of juridical equality of states."

In its argument, Mexico seemingly denied any meaningful grant of sovereignty in joining the OAS. And the rigidity of the Mexican position, coupled with a snide attitude toward most of its OAS brethren, raised doubts among many delegations whether Mexico was actually arguing technical points of the Rio Treaty. In some instances, particularly in the formal presentation, it seemed as if Mexico were merely using the conference for a flashy display of independence.

But despite frequent hints by the delegation that Mexico might not comply with a conference decision, the majority refused to budge. In the final vote, 15 arms thrust into the air supporting mandatory resolutions and, of equal importance, placing the OAS majority firmly on the side of "quality" measures. The four-power insistence on unanimity stood rejected.

AND THIS TIME, in contrast to the Punta del Este conference where six nations abstained on the expulsion of Castro's government from the OAS, the countries voting against the resolution must show compliance through a positive act on their part—shutting down their embassies in Havana. There can be no hedging on this, although the time limit on breaking relations remains vague.

The ball is thus clearly in the Mexican-Chilean court. Bolivia has already announced its intention to comply, and Uruguay is expected to follow shortly. Despite major domestic political pressures, chances are that Chile will continue its adherence to the treaty and comply—although possibly not before the upcoming change in administration.

Mexico remains a big question mark. Just what Mexican refusal to comply would mean is unclear. The mandatory resolutions passed by the majority did not place any limit for breaking relations, but obviously some sort of juridically "reasonable" time clock is ticking.

Neither is the question clear what steps the OAS nations would take in forcing Mexican compliance. The OAS charter contains no provisions for ex-

pressing uncooperative members. Betting is that Mexico will drag its heels and eventually comply.

BUT REGARDLESS of how Mexico finally decides, the significance of the conference resolutions for long-term OAS development was the majority's willingness to face fellow members with this difficult alternative. When asked, "what will happen to the OAS if Mexico refuses to comply?" one Latin diplomat replied, "the question is more properly what will happen to Mexico."

Some diplomats find the biggest plus of the resolutions in the virtual acceptance of the idea that subversion is to be considered a form of aggression under the Rio Treaty. "We're now geared to fight a new kind of war," said Costa Rica's Daniel Oduber, "a war without generals or tanks or declarations of war." From now on propaganda, money and infiltrated arms may justify armed retaliation.

But the real question answered by this conference was whether the organization would be strengthened by effective measures not supported unanimously by all the members. Fifteen nations joined Venezuela in betting that it would.

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